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FOUNDED BY ALEXANDER HAMILTON IN 1801

Mysteries of the CIA

An intriguing view of the CIA is unfolded in a heavily censored version of secret testimony just released by the Senate Armed Services Committee.

Sen. Frank Symington (D-Mo.) is quoted as suggesting that the so-called "missile gap" which so alarmed the nation a little while ago may have been a figment of CIA imagination.

"The missile gap was created by the nation's intelligence agency," the Senator said in an exchange with Defense Secretary McNamara. "It has been eliminated; it was never there."

The disclosure appears to raise a most serious charge against the CIA—either of sheer incompetence or of the manipulation of its estimates for devious reasons.

At the very least it was a matter meriting some discussion when John A. McCone's nomination as Director of the CIA was before the Senate. Since Symington was a major casualty of the CIA's "now-you-see-it, now-you-don't" missile gap hypothesis, one might have expected him to have been in the vanguard of those demanding such a discussion. Instead he was a leader in discouraging debate over the need for added controls over the CIA and in heading off a probe of whether McCone's biases might accentuate the existing weaknesses of the Agency.

"It is rather fascinating," the Senator commented in summarizing CIA's reversal of its estimate of Soviet missile strength. The Senator's complacency in light of this disclosure has a certain fascination too.